



**International Boundary and Water Commission
United States Section
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USIBWC TO LEAD NEW RIVER TASK FORCE SUPPORTED BY CONGRESSMAN FILNER

Commissioner Arturo Q. Duran of the United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) has agreed to spearhead a binational task force convened by Congressman Bob Filner to address New River pollution. The New River Task Force comprised of representatives of the U.S. and Mexican Sections of the International Boundary and Water Commission, Congressman Filner's office, EPA, the California State Water Resources Control Board, the Border Environment Cooperation Commission, the North American Development Bank, and the Calexico New River Committee will promote public input and develop a long-term funding strategy to address the problem.

"The New River situation is unacceptable," said Commissioner Duran. "As U.S. Commissioner I will work tirelessly until pollution in the New River is addressed and a strategy in place to enable Calexico residents to enjoy a healthier ecosystem."

The strategy envisioned by the Calexico New River Committee, the City of Calexico, the Colorado River Water Quality Control Board, the County of Imperial, the Congressional Task Force on the New River, and other Imperial Valley organizations involves four main components: a trash screen; construction of an enclosed box culvert alongside the current river

channel through the developed areas of Calexico so that normal flow can be re-routed into the culvert, thereby eliminating residents' exposure and allowing for treatment of contaminated flows; construction of wetlands to address overall pollution, including pollution from sources in the United States; and construction of green belts and recreational facilities in a restored New River floodplain.

The New River originates 15 miles south of Mexicali, Baja California, picking up untreated and partially treated industrial, municipal, and agricultural waste as it flows northward, crossing the international boundary at Calexico, California. It then travels approximately 60 miles through Imperial County before discharging into the Salton Sea. The New River is considered one of the most polluted rivers in North America with high concentrations of coliform bacteria and trash. Calexico residents complain about the persistent stench of the river and potential adverse health effects as it flows through their community.

Both Commissioner Duran and Congressman Filner have worked diligently to bring key federal, state, local, and binational entities to the table. Although past initiatives have attempted to deal with New River pollution, this Task Force will actively promote public input, allowing local organizations to interact with authorities from all three levels of government to make the best use of a potential \$5 million grant to the California Department of Transportation for bike paths and public park space adjacent to the New River. Congressman Filner succeeded in including the grant in the federal highway bill passed by the U.S. House of Representatives. The New River Task Force will also develop a long-term funding strategy. The USIBWC stands ready to support engineering efforts to improve conditions in the New River by providing technical assistance and coordinating with Mexico.

Congressman Filner commended USIBWC and Commissioner Duran for their foresight and proactive attitude. "We have made great progress in reducing sewage along San Diego's

border and we can do the same in Calexico. Cooperation between the different stakeholders is critical to making sure this happens,” said Congressman Filner. He recognized the efforts of the other organizations participating in the Task Force and in Border 2012, a border environmental program cosponsored by EPA and Mexico’s environmental ministry. He reiterated his commitment to support and work with the Task Force.

Pablo Orozco, Executive Director of the Calexico New River Committee, is pleased with the support of USIBWC and other Task Force members, especially their commitment to take action. “We are very heartened and pleased that Congressman Filner and Commissioner Duran have taken the initiative to lead this effort,” Orozco said. He thanked Task Force members including Bernardino Olague (Principal Engineer, USIBWC), Jorge C. Garces (Deputy Managing Director, North American Development Bank), Fernando Macias (General Manager, Border Environment Cooperation Commission), Nancy Woo (Associate Director, Water Division, EPA), and Pete Silva (Board Member, State Water Resources Control Board-Cal/EPA) for their commitment to provide the support necessary for implementing the New River Sanitation Improvements Project. “This Task Force has given our community a sense of renewed hope that state and federal government will continue in their work to help protect us from New River pollution,” Orozco added.

For more information:

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